If You Want to See a Good Show, Better Go to Italy

Nothing Much Worth Looking at in England, and, by Implication, Nothing Here—But Italy?—Ah!

By Gordon Craig

I

WHETHER or no there be an art of the theatre . . . whether it be a fine art . . . whether acting is the whole of that art or but part of the whole . . . whether the drama should be spoken or sung . . . whether scenic show is a nuisance or not . . . whether an audience should applaud or remain silent . . . an actor paint or not paint his fact . . . animals be allowed on the stage . . . men act the female rôles . . . prompters be heard and not seen, or both . . . these and at least another three dozen questions afford not only England but one or two other nations perennial exercise for speculation.

We try our teeth year in and year out on these grave and trivial questions . . . questions not to be chewed . . . we chew them incessantly.

We are still chewing them on our way to the theatre; we continue quietly all through the first act; during the first interval we start afresh . . . munch, munch, munch . . . by the end of Act 3 we have swallowed them along with the preposterous performance offered to us as drama.

We become quite ill.

We go home after it's all over . . . to have a good talk, and we decide to reject the drama . . . "besides, who ever heard of drama without horses?" . . . and the chewing recommences until Apollo in his chariot of eight comes galloping up, decently hidden, let us thank Heaven, by the Middlesex mists.

We are so German in this minor matter of the arts. They, too, mix up trivial and serious questions relating to theatre and drama: and Fritz and Elsa feel they have the sole right to them all just as Jack and Mary feel that the questions are theirs.

But we must never forget . . . never again forget . . . that there are other nations besides England and Germany.

Some of these, adopting this Anglo-Saxon trick, go in for the yearly cackle but with more emotion than we do . . . with them it becomes . . . "just thrilling" . . .

I suppose no one will imagine I mean that our whole people wastes its time and energy over an unprofitable foolery. I mean no such thing. But I do mean that a very large clique, or "public" as it's called, does this, and at the people's expense, and the net result is labelled "Public Opinion."

We have no English theatre for this reason. A clique has chewed it up. A public has cheated a people.

Had the people been left alone they would have loved nothing better than to lend a hand in creating a theatre for us long ago . . . a representative English theatre. Shall I tell you how a people lends a hand?

It accepts what it is given, applauds or hisses it, but it does not dictate with irritating persistence what the dishes are to be like, and it does not permit prejudice to spoil a chance of enjoyment. It leaves the dishes to the choice of the artists . . . and it goes to the feast prepared to enjoy it if it can.

But the cliques or publics of certain nations do dictate and are prejudiced, and prejudice others. They are prejudiced to such an extent against all but their own particular fads that their prejudices become passions with them, and thus a tenth-rate theatre is produced and a first-rate drama is destroyed just because of a chewing clique.

Our drama was first rate. It has been destroyed.

II

If in some lands genius and intellect are so general that their peoples can afford to waste them in this way, in other lands they are still looked on as rather rare and treasured accordingly.

It is in such lands accepted that dramatic genius is a thing valuable to a nation and that it is a thing to be preserved. Art does not awaken animosity toward artists in the hearts of these peoples because it is not commerce—or commercial.

In the great eastern empires and among the virile Latin races this is so. To preserve what is rare is with these peoples so natural an instinct that they have come to love the spirit which creates what we call works of art; to look upon the artists as a body which you must not persecute, and the genius as a man you must recognize and use.

Had chance ordained Shakespeare to be born in Italy the people would have seen to it that Shakespeare's plays could be heard and seen this evening in most Italian theatres. They are not concerned in egoistical destruction of one of the best things in life, and they recognize it as something closely woven into life itself . . . which, when cut out of the life of a people, does harm to that people. They do not argue and discuss theories, though if an artist offers to propound his theory they are all attention . . . all attention.

They have the talent of attention, these restless people . . . these very polite people.

III

There is no Easterner and no South European who will question for one moment my obvious statement made to the English that pantomime, or dumb-show, as we so stupidly call it, is the very essence of dramatic art. They will kno— that when I state this I do not necessarily exclude all else . . . it is only the English-speaking cliques who, crazy with their passionate prejudices, instantly grow indignant, come fluttering out like a flock of roaring doves, and cry out that I am a dangerous innovator. Innovator! Pantomime is one of the most ancient and purest forms of the art of the theatre.

At the risk of wearying the doves into another flight and squeak, I will repeat the obvious statement. Pantomime is the essence of drama. It is therefore a universal art . . . a universal means of expression.

An act . . . a thing done . . . is always dramatic . . . it must be so by reason of its nature. A thing said is only sometimes dramatic. A gesture says more than a speech and says it better. By the time you have explained a thing it grows cold . . . but the deed grows.

Now one would think that a form of expression so universal and so active as the dramatic could thrive very easily everywhere . . . and that England would merely have to import some Asiatics or some Germans or some Russians to London and the drama would flourish once more in our principal island. But a second element has to be reckoned with. To the activity of the artist must be added the passivity of the listener or beholder.

As I am speaking here to a wide public, and though there are many who will understand what I mean by the passive listener, there are some who will be indignant at once and presume I mean "doormats," let me say I mean no such thing. The passive listener is the man or woman who has the talent of attention, acknowledged to be a positive and not a negative quality: the passive listener believes that there is such a thing as genius and that it is rare; he recognizes that the expression of genius is a spirit to be preserved, by taking care to watch and to listen whenever anything expressive is to be seen or heard.

There is plenty of expression in the English temperament, but the cliques, always believing expression to be something queer and foreign, give us no time to lend an ear to what our native artists want to say, and flutter and fluster and cry out until some foreign goods are shipped over for us. But they don't stop there.

They pester every one until he or she, in sheer self-protection, has to admit that the foreign goods are "perfectly wonderful," "the only way to act," "the loveliest inventions"; and, by the way, is it not sometimes something English which has come back home to them by a foreign route? . . .

Their point is gained . . . to be able to be peculiar; to know strange foreign things . . . dramas . . . dances . . . drugs . . . to be held as expert by the ignorant. This, remember, all the time at the expense of the English people!

IV

The Italian theatre is unique. Unlike the German theatre and the Russian theatre, if you transplant it it cannot thrive nowadays. The eager enthusiasm shown by us but lately toward the German companies previous to the war . . . the hectic delirium expressed by a certain portion of London society for Russian ballet dancers . . . was not so much an expression of fondness for Russian or German work as ignorance, detestation of, or snobbish indifference to, English endeavor. For doubtless there existed at that time the makings of an English ballet, not merely as good as that which was shipped over from Petrograd, but better. Surely there was some artist able to have created something as good as "The Miracle" among us in 1911-'12.

But the law of the cliques and parties was considered final in those days. What exactly was as good or better than these we shall never know . . . except for the critics, few of us stopped to find out. Lest we might avail ourselves of an English work of art, the foreign goods were shipped into London in all haste, and we, the public, made to pay through the nose for them in the market . . . Covent Garden Market.

The exact cost of "The Miracle" . . . a theatrical show given at Olympia lasting eight weeks . . . amounted, I understand, to about £70,000. What the Russian ballet cost us you will no doubt admit is incalculable. It should therefore be good news to the real Englishman to hear that the Italian theatre is not importable. This fact, let us hope, will assist in allowing our own artists to show England exactly what they can do . . . when given as much support as was tendered to Germans and Russians.

V

I have touched on these home matters not only because the subject seems to escape most other writers year in and year out, but because it is fit prelude to what I have to say about the theatre of the land in which I am a guest . . . that of Italy. And if I reveal but small knowledge of my subject, will you attribute it to anything rather than lack of admiration and remember that the Italian theatre has been dealt with by Signor D'Ancona, Comm. Corrado Ricci, Signor Scherillo and many other scholars. I can but put down a note or two . . . things I have observed when as passive spectator I visited the Italian playhouses.

At home . . . one's real home . . . one is so sure of one's family that one knows one can say anything there. One can speak severely about one's own theatre and no one with sense will mind . . . but to find a single fault in the theatre of one's hosts is not only out of the question, but for me not possible. I do not see any faults. So now to pull aside the curtain and reveal a few of its perfections.

Javanese Marionette, from the Collection of the Gordon Craig Studio, Florence, Italy.

Its first is, as I said just now, that it cannot be imported. You may invite a Salvini over or a Mme. Duse, but that is not importing the Italian theatre.

When you can import the Adriatic and Apennines to England you will be able to import the Italian theatre, too . . . and not before: . . . for the Italian theatre is the Italian people.

The Italian drama and Italian acting in Italy are a very fine growth indeed . . . Transplant shoots of it to England and wrong impressions are created.

You go to see some Italian actors in London and wonder why it is all rather exaggerated. You think it is very "Italian" . . . it is not: that is merely a little nervousness on their part. Their nerves get on edge the moment they arrive at Dover . . . They have an awful feeling that they have come to the wrong place.

In their hearts they are devotedly yours, but what they find hard to swallow is the insularity of it all . . . such a lot of water in the wine. And this is, as we know, nothing but their ill-luck, for we choose the wrong people to meet them . . . or rather we allow the cliques to choose.

Gush and flop may please Russian and German talent . . . it offends the Italian spirit to the quick. Superiority, . . . drawling superiority especially, . . . the grin also offends it. Intellectualism makes it feel unhappy and ill at ease; and snobbery . . . but this last blow completes the hash we make in greeting our guest, and the spirit he had brought with him returns on the wing to the South, while Signor ———, the celebrated Italian actor, remains behind, . . . a thing of shreds and patches, . . . a rather portly Harlequin, maybe . . . but not the spirit of the Italian theatre.

If we would only let him be aware of our Humanity . . . if we would come off the roof . . . things would all be so different. Why should we fear to? . . . why? . . .

VI

The spirit of the Italian theatre is a thing created as spontaneously to-day as it was in 1500 or in 1700.

Every night in every Italian theatre this spirit is evoked . . . it fills the place for a while, baffling description. It is an event of the first magnitude.

Only for a couple of hours, and then in three minutes it dissolves . . . scatters . . . where is it? Evidently alive still, for to-morrow it again becomes evident.

An Italian theatre is one of the living rooms of the Italian's house . . . a room they love to go into every day . . . not a "best parlor," . . . no tidied drawing room . . . their smokeroom rather, where they can relax and say what they like and buono notte. The place of ease . . . a real place.

Intelligent of them to prevent the place of pretending from becoming unreal.

VII

The spectators go to the theatre in evening dress or in whatever dress they feel fits their mood. For this reason every one arrives at the theatre in the right mood . . . his own mood: he does not go to the theatre to act, but to see acting. No one has to switch off his reality and put on a mask except the actors.

Does not this in itself seem remarkable to some of us English . . . that people should prepare to live and let live, to enjoy and let others enjoy, . . . we who find on arriving in a theatre far too many folk curious about their neighbors . . . conscious of themselves . . . glared at by a select front row of the pit . . . disdainful of that front row and the crowd behind it . . . eager for notice . . . yet offended when noticed . . . signalling with affected gestures to "dear Mabel" or "dear old Tom," . . . fussing . . . fluttering . . . decked out, dished up and damnable.

In Italy no one in front of the house is self-conscious, no one nervous. Hence no nervousness is transmitted to the actors when the curtain rises. All starts fair . . . all is real . . . natural. So then if Miss Smith, the actress, chances to trip over a carpet on her entrance the thing passes unnoticed. In England it would evoke a delightful flush all over the house and a spasm of intimate sympathy and a tittered round of applause.

All is real—easy; unconcerned; almost phlegmatic—in the Italian audience before the play begins, especially in Roman theatres. I have found it the same in Bologna, in Genoa, in Milan and in Naples, and indeed often in Florence; though while, in this last city, the audiences can be amazingly real, there is a faint suggestion that they are on the verge of becoming slightly self-conscious. The reason is not far to seek.

But if, as a rule, the Italian audiences take their seats indifferent to what is to come or who is in the house, it is another matter as soon as the curtain is up. Without childish eagerness, but with all the interest of live, full-grown beings, the mind of the audience begins to move and concentrate its force upon the stage. One can see that nothing is hampering the actors—no flow of the wrong electric waves—and the great compliment of subordinate attention from all the spectators is going to help them.

The most indifferent audience in Italy is in the matter of attention rather like the picked audiences which in 1880-1900 used to visit the Lyceum Theatre in London to see "The Bells" and "Nance Oldfield," "The Lyons Mail" and the Shakespearian drama.

VIII

The Italian theatres are of all sizes and periods. There are numbers of ancient theatres being used at this day. In Florence, the Pergola (1657), the Nazionale . . . the Niccolini and the Alfieri. In Rome, the Argentina and the Valle. In Bologna, the Communale (1763), the Teatro del Corso (1805). In Naples, the San Carlo (1737); in Verona, the Filarmonico. A list of them all would take up several pages of this magazine. There is hardly a city which is not able to boast a great or little masterpiece of construction, and hardly one which does boast of it.

You may not even have heard of Fano, of Forli, of Reggio, of Imola, of Sabionetta; yet all these places can boast theatres of note. In Reggio, for example, a small town and unremarkable, is one of the largest theatres in Italy; in Fano one of the oldest.

But if Italy refrains from boasting of its monumental theatres it is chiefly because it continues to use and enjoy them. The citizens enjoy their nightly pleasure of sitting in their masterpieces, and they take it all for granted. To them it is as natural that Bibiena, Sighizzi, Pozzo and Morelli should have provided them with the best buildings of their kind in Europe as that the best actors in Europe should presently be walking and talking before them. Thus has the grandest theatre in Europe come to exist—by a people expecting nothing less from the Muses—and taking it all as a matter of course . . . and as a matter for delight.

As for their actors and actresses, you must not imagine that Italian crowds rush hither and thither to catch a sight of celebrated performers. Such a thing could not be and has not been known. Italians are not vulgar—never think that—nor have they the raw sentimentality of the modern Anglo-Saxon theatregoers. So that when Tomaso Salvini was alive I have seen him returning to his home in the tramcar and not one single cry, lisp, or gasp from the people in the tram—no nudging, conscious attempts to seem not to notice him—no "Oh, Mr. Salvini, may I shake you by the hand?" He was merely a Florentine gentleman going home with others—the most natural and easy thing in the world.

When Mme. Duse drives out in Rome maidens do not clutch at one another crying, "Did you see . . . she! the Divine One?"—old men are not to be met, their cheeks bathed in tears, muttering, "She has just passed—now let me depart in peace!"

Italy, from Rome to Reggio, is far too great for this; the spirit, the mind, of the Roman man and woman far too real. I ought to add that there is no such institution as the Garrick Club for Italian actors. Is it a blessing . . . who can say? A grand club seems essential to our English-speaking theatre—but then that is because with us the social status of the actor is as important as to know how to act. Again, may this not all come from the fact that our own actors are not given a chance?

When I first met Salvini, I felt rather as an English enthusiast is brought up to feel, but I have learned since to curb this climbing zeal. Off the boards the actor ceases to be an actor because he is allowed to become a real being—one of the crowd—one of the Italian people. . . .

Of the acting I will not speak. Who will describe the olive and the vine of Italy . . . the most ordinary and perfect things of this beautiful land? Well, the acting is like the olive and the vine—it is perfect.

IX

In short, the Italian theatre is the Italian people. They go to the theatre without prejudice and without curiosity—they act for very little money and they pay little money for their seats. They spend little money on the stage fittings and as little as possible on titivating the boxes, seats and the bars.

Some of the best theatres are still without façades—have been unfinished for centuries. Conceive us in England building a theatre from the heart outward. Heavens alive! we know a thing or two, and one is to always put up a shell first of all and then line it inside with the nicest plush and satin, word perfect waitresses and rattling fine bars; and after all that is done it is quite time enough to see that Shakespeare is excluded and the chandelier in place, so that all may be right on the night. But all this criticism of England is solely due to the fact that we do not take the theatre seriously in our land. Whereas, I want you to realize that in Italy it is an essential part of Italian life and has been so for centuries.

If I have failed to make this clearer to those who think the Italian theatre is comparable with the English theatre and is a rather poor sort of affair when compared with it, let me as I end retrieve my blunder by stating, after the fullest reflection and after years passed in the practice of the theatre, that the Italian theatre is the most cultured, the most distinguished and the first theatre in Europe.

Some of us have worked to make the English theatre the first in Europe. . . . I know of whole families devoted to nothing but this. But when these look for the people for whom they have worked, they find a newspaper or a religious society or some meddling puritanical busybody preaching to the people not to go in there.

Don't go in there,
'Tis a house of ill fame,
Don't go in there
Or you'll lose your good name.

Your mother and your sisters are waiting at the gate,
Enter not them portals—pause before it be too late.

So it is only the people who can make our theatre—the people and we, their servants. If the "public" or large cliques are allowed to come between us, all is at an end and there will be no English theatre.

If that trumped-up thing, "public opinion," is allowed to voice and revoice its trivial opinions—its trash—everywhere and thus nullify the creative power which we and the people possess, I pray heartily for that day when the people shall rise up and utterly destroy the destroyer—that which has come between art and our national life.

Decoration from "The Mask," Gordon Craig's magazine of the art of the theatre.

"Jusqu'au Bout!"—*by Myrtle Gebhart*

"OH—OH—HELL!"

Jinks turned involuntarily and found himself staring at the most delectable bit of daintiness he had witnessed since leaving "God's country" on his very particular and individualistic mission of canning the Kaiser. The pastime of using his eyes to such tremendously good advantage proved so satisfactory that he just quite forgot to look away after a decently short inspection, as any young and unchaperoned male should in a furrin land.

"Ain't it a plumb doggone shame?" he grinned in sympathy, his frank blue eyes twinkling, his blond hair all ruffled by the breeze. "He coulda made second if his foot hadn't slipped."

The tiny vision deigned to notice his lowly existence, turning upon him two very large, golden-flecked brown eyes, deliciously enticing and yet indefinably portcullising. An instant of startled embarrassment, an awed survey, a wistful softening, and he was rewarded with a smile almost of reverence.

"M'sieur, he did arrive at ze deuxième—how you say?—ah, baze! He did. I see heem!" she wailed, her English quaintly accented. Her red lips pouted adorably—but, of course, she didn't know that! "Eet ees to—to cuss, M'sieur le Sammee! . . . See, I can talk ze Yankee-talk, oui? I hear it beaucoup, upon ze streets of Paris. . . . But zat—how do you call heem?—Umpire, he ees un diable! Mon Dieu! He ees ver-ray bad—n'est ce pas?"

"You bet your boots!" agreed Jinks heartily; then surged red beneath his tan and added hastily, "I mean: oui, oui! You just say the word and I'll go right out there and knock his block off."

She didn't know what that was; but, maybe, the umpire man needed it in his profession, so she'd better let him keep it.

"Mais non, mon gladisteur," she forbade him primly, twisting one little thumb upward in token of her gracious leniency. "We shall ignore heem, yes?" Crinkling her tip-tilted nose just as far heavenward as it would possibly go, she stuck out a rosy tongue at the offending umpire. This small matter of feminine reprisal being attended to so efficiently, she sighed happily—for had she not just taken unto her lonely little self a gallant knight in khaki, a brave fellow who would go right out there and knock off a man's block—whatever du diable that might be—if she but commanded? A knight who was fully six feet long and goodness knows how wide! Whose chin was of a firmness; whose eyes frankly admired her, and about whose mouth were forming clusters of faintly tense lines—the meaning of which she divined, with a queer clutch at her hitherto absolutely uncluchable heart. It was the look of the trenches, bred by the passionate moment of war intoxication, nurtured upon the daily tautness of the fighting zone.

"Understand the game?" he queried, jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward the diamond marked upon the dazzling whiteness of Longchamp race course.

"Does one know la langue grecque? Ees one then one fountain of wisdom?" she shrugged, rolling her eyes upward by way of betokening absolute uncomprehension of such befuddling intricacies. "Eet ees so—how do you say?—ah, so meexed up. One wonders what eet ees all about."

"But I heard you cheering a moment ago!" he laughed. "Didn't you know what you were yellin' for?"

A pained silence rewarded his teasing.

"Mais non! Certainement non!" She regarded him sweetly; but, oh, very, very icily. "But eet ees to cheer, n'est ce pas? One does, yes?"

Her insouciant seriousness wellnigh sent him into convulsions of mirth.

"Better let me come up and elucidate," he begged.

"Whatever zat may be, you may do heem, M'sieur l'Américain," she gave gracious permission.

Whereupon he scrambled up the tier of benches and over a multitude of knees and sprawled beside her, explaining volubly and with typical enthusiasm the technique of the most wonderful (adjectives, adjectives, et cetera, et cetera ad infinitum) game in the world: baseball. However, his jargon puzzled her. "Sacrifice hits," "bases on balls," "three-base hits," "double plays," "on the slab," "stolen bases" and other similar terms meant absolutely nothing in her young life.

"Understand now?" he asked breathlessly, having ended his monologue.

She answered affirmatively, pursing her red lips. "Il est parfait jusque la," she assured him sweetly. "Mille remerciements!"

The fourth inning had closed with a score of 5 to 1 in favor of the Marines. The National Guard nine seemed in for a licking, but they were taking it with a fighting grin—the customary American receipt for just anything that happens along.

Jinks's appreciative eyes noted the sweet daintiness of his companion—like a cool draught of water quaffed from a pearl cup by a man parched with desert wandering was she to the youth but recently tried and branded by war's furnace. The milky, transparent skin, faintly flushed with excitement, the tempting curves of her moist little red mouth, the fluff of her auburn hair beneath the droopy, beribboned hat, the adorable, desirable, bewitching littleness of her! Why, she'd make just one sizable armful.

Undiscerning male that he was, he failed to perceive the tawdriness of her finery, a pathetic sham in imitation of the richly gowned Parisiennes who filled the boxes. He awkwardly likened her to the essence of rose perfume, all sprinkled with pastel colored dewdrops. Which was as far as he could get with similes. (But his "buddies" would have been dumfounded at the distance!)

"I'm from Texas," he vouchsafed proudly.

"O—oh!" She nodded. "Zat eet ees jus' without New York, yes?"

"Well," he drawled, "it's a nice little stroll down there, especially if you're in a hurry. . . . By the way, I left my cardcase at home," he grinned contagiously, "my name's Jinks Mumford. I'm on my first permission, after four months' initiation in the manly art of chasing the Huns hell for leather outa France. I'm stayin' at the Y. M. C. A., at 36 rue de l'Echiquier." He seemed vastly proud of the fact that he could pronounce the name of at least one thoroughfare.

"Oui, eet was ze Hotel Pavillon—now ze Egrec, em, say, ah, me, I know."

A silence fell upon them; for the first time in his young career Jinks deigned not to notice a baseball game. The trees rustled their golden-flecked leaves and murmured faint nothings to the weary-souled ones who had flocked to the Bois de Boulogne to watch the new-fangled American game. A colorful scene: blue and khaki uniforms, banks of them, sprinkled with light dresses of the women and dark, mourning clothes. About the French a cloud, a dumb passivity, a tired, patient doggedness, an invincibility; irradiating from the Yanks a sprightly exuberance. And upon the faces of the women—what meant that queer little mocking smile?

Shafts of glad sunlight glanced sideways through the overhanging, interlacing branches, shifted over the throng with fleeting, warm caresses, dancing golden traceries upon the greensward. Above, the placid sapphire of the sky was irritated with fluffy, foamy white clouds, which teased a bit and then frolicked onward, ever seeking new pastures for their caprices. Up the chestnuts, mounting spirally, swirled gorgeous scarlet woodpeckers, sparkled in green and orange. And, interspersing the strips of woodland, gleamed sheets of rippling water, surging founts, sunken pools, tiny, witching lakes of it—the whole guarded by a wonderful blue and gold and white peace.

Jinks sighed; 'twas hard to credit one's senses.

"To-day, ces eet not of a beauty, mon Sammee?" she murmured his thoughts in a voice like little gold bells all softly chiming. Her black lashes dropped upon her pink-flooded cheeks. "To-day le bon Dieu has made eet för—for love. N'est ce pas?"

The red flush began at his chin and chased itself right up to the roots of his hair. He laughed deprecatingly, nervous hands fumbling with his peaked service cap.

"But, you see, ma'm'selle"——

"Nanette," she supplied.

"Ma'm'selle Nanette, it's like this: I—I don't know anything about love. In fact I'm an awful greenhorn on such matters," he grinned infectiously.

"Lean closer, mon ami. I shall tell to you a secret: I have nevaire possess' a lover! Eet ees to weep! Ah, how jealous of zose ozzer girls—zey who have receive lettaires from ze front and send ze packages of sweets and cigarettes. Also I have long to know one Yank—one sees zem all about Paris." She sighed, a very deep sigh for such a tiny girl.

"Afraid of us?"

She tossed her head. "Mais non—not of ze beegness, non. But one fears ze bad opinion. See? Voilà. Eeet ees of what you t'ink zat we fear."

"Oh! You're afraid we may not think you're nice; that you're a lady?" he laughed uproariously. What a rare one she was, with her seriousness!

"Oui! You see, m'sieur, I am a midinette. I mus' be careful."

His face blanched of its brick red and he wet his lips. "You're a wh—what?" he stammered, frank eyes mirroring unbelief and horror.

She burst into peal upon peal of fluty laughter.

"M'sieur, he misunderstan'. He means, am I une grisette, une cocotte?"

"Well, ain't they the same?" he demanded sheepishly. "They sound alike."

"Mais non! Une midinette, she is a working girl. Me, I have make ze beeg shells for to keel zose boches. Parbleu!—what a man! You are of a droliness." She raised two very saucy brown eyes to his. "Eet ees to lament zat m'sieur, he hav' no boss! None to teach heem! Pauvre garçon!"

"Aw, g'wan! You—you wouldn't want to adopt me, would you, now?" he begged eagerly, all the big earnestness of him touching her heart.

Joyous little thrills chased themselves all through her slim young body. "However does one do eet? Me, I am one greenhorn!" she cried, delighted at her annexation of a perfectly nice new word. Raising her portcullis of chaste aloofness, she calmly took him into the heart of her.

"Aw, I guess I just nominate you my guardian."

"An' you, m'sieur—you shall be mon cher filleul. Bien, oui! Ah!" she made a pathetic little moue; "vous venez juste à temps. Jus' at ze right time you have come, mon ami, to save me from ze desolation terrible!"

At that moment the American band rang forth in the stirring strains of the "Marseillaise." The hushed crowd surged to its feet as a mighty movement, a towering automaton, a bulwark of strength that is upheld by a bulwark whose force had been proven in bringing peace to the world. Jinks glanced about. And once again pondered. Then his roving eyes came home to roost, as men's eyes have a way of doing, and rested upon the girl who had just "adopted" him. Gone was her coquetry, her playful provocativeness; like a slim bolt of white-hot lightning she stood, a tiny bit of crucible steel—France's finest and stanchest weapons were often found in the smallest packages—a whitely, quietly blazing fire of purpose. And that little set smile, as inscrutable to his eyes as that of La Gioconda, but firmer, more positive.

"'The Pride of France' we call eet, ze smile, mon filleul," she answered the question in his eyes. "We women of France, we wear ze mask, zat ze bleeding heart she be not seen by ze world."

"Our women haven't got it yet." He scarcely realized that his lips framed the words, so introspective were his thoughts.

"Mais oui," she quietly contradicted. "Soon you are to return, now that you and we have won our fight. You will see it on their faces—their bleeding hearts bare to the world—when their men come home—and do not come. Until they learn to wear the mask even as we have learned. And they will not regret having given—even as we do not regret. You will see."

Her big brown eyes, suddenly serious, gazed steadily westward, where, out of a purple mist of inscrutability, rose the summit of Mont Valérien, wondrously bathed in a sunset of russet and gold.

And in the heart of Jinks, the Texan, the sweet promise of her, the incipient desire, grew and throbbed and thrilled and receded, overwhelmed with a reverence which claimed his being as no other emotion had ever before swayed him. His very soul surged in a pæan of homage to her; his groping hand clasped the girl's, tightened.

"Always, Nanette?" he whispered pleadingly, in a voice that was strangely choked and queerly husky. God! but weren't they worth fighting for, these women! Who smiled to cover a bleeding heart! He experienced some difficulty in disciplining an unruly and brand new lump which seemed to have taken possession of his throat. "Always, girl?"

"Jusqu'au bout," she replied softly.

"To the end. Of what? The war's over. To the end of what, Nanette, my sweet?"

The funny, deep, choky note in his voice touched her, and her warm, little fingers curled around his as she murmured dreamily:

"Jusqu'au bout. To ze end—of ze world, cher."